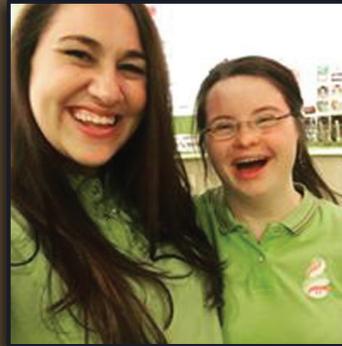


breaking ground

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Featuring:

The Rest of the Menchie's Story



Council on
Developmental Disabilities

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Cover Photos: Left to right, row 1: Madison Asbury, Reid Beeler, Sadie Anderson (store leader), Elise McDaniel, Micheal McIntyre; Row 2: Houston Vandergriff, Candace McGinnis, Alex Arellanes, Anna Hart; Row 3: Anna Hart and Mikie Nack, Jesse Harness, Anna Hart, Matthew LeCompte
All Menchie's photos by Meredith Copeland.



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The Rest of the Menchie's Story

by Christi Rice

All photos by Meredith Copeland

For those of you who read the earlier article in *Breaking Ground* about the Menchie's employment initiative (Issue #77, March 2015), you may recall that this whole thing started because my son, Wesley, wanted a job. He was given that chance at a Menchie's frozen yogurt location in Knoxville, through the kindness and forethought of Menchie's owner, Alan Sims. Alan and I put our heads together to see if we could provide opportunities for Wesley, and other young adults with disabilities, to learn transferable work skills and earn a paycheck in a welcoming and supportive environment.

Two years later we continue to employ people with disabilities, and our archive of employment success stories continues to grow.

A simple model

Our model is simple: we team employees with disabilities (called Team Members at Menchie's) up with Shift Leaders who have a heart to help the Team Members "with differences" be successful. We expect these Team Members to do the job as any other person would. We let them know from the beginning that this is a real job with real responsibilities that results in a real paycheck!

We have found that our Team Members take great pride in their work. They are always willing and they always work hard. When you come into the store you'll be greeted with a smile by a young person who is thankful for the opportunity to show the community his or her abilities!

Our motto continues to be "everybody can do something". To date we have employed approximately 24 individuals with disabilities, and we currently have 14 Team Members on board.

Individualized expectations

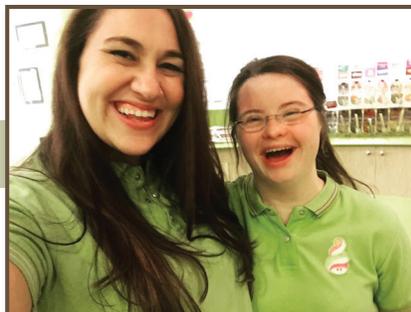
The hours they work and the job expectations are



Anna Hart

individualized, based on their abilities at any given stage. We typically bring them in for a short day shift just to get to know them and to determine how we can best help them be successful. Often, our Team Members are ready to move up to a closing shift rather quickly. We have found it just comes down to believing they can and providing the supports they need.

We are hopeful other businesses will follow our lead. There is nothing fancy about what we do. It only requires a heart that cares, ears to listen, some creative thinking and problem solving. We have definitely had our share of challenges as any business will, but the lessons learned have motivated us to push forward and do even better.



Sadie Anderson and Elise McDaniel

A beautiful mix of folks

We have employed students from Tennessee School for the Deaf, University of Tennessee Knoxville's FUTURE post-secondary program, Breakthrough Corporation, local high schools, homeschoolers and young people who have already graduated. Their disabilities

vary and every single team member is unique in their own right. Our Shift Leaders come from all walks of life; we have University of Tennessee students who have never worked with people with disabilities, and those who have siblings with disabilities. Our store is a beautiful mix of folks with one goal in mind: to see our Team Members be as successful as possible in the work force.

Some of our team members have learned to use public transportation to get to work. Others have learned to work the cash register or open and close the store independently. We have one Team Member who is now learning to be a Shift Leader, which is a huge move up for him.

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Menchie's Story ... *Continued from page 3*

We never limit the Team Members and we always provide the opportunities, if they are willing, to press forward in their skills acquisition and even move on to other job options in the community when they are ready.

Jesse A.

This young man came to us, as they all do, just wanting a chance. We started him on our Monday shift during the day to determine his abilities and just to get to know him. Soon he began helping our store manager with the weekly truck delivery. Jesse learned very quickly how to date the product and put away stock. He also learned how to open the store, set up the cold bar, unstack chairs and of course his favorite job, "water welding", a.k.a. doing the dishes.

Jesse is so passionate about his job and it shows in everything he does. He is always on time, dependable and has a great attitude about his job. We can always count on him. Jesse saved his pay check for many months and bought a leaf blower. His dream job is to work with a landscape company doing yard work.

Allie

Allie came to us when we were first launching this venture. She began working in the dining area but we quickly realized the level of noise and activity was a little too much for her. After talking with Allie we decided to bring her to the back of the store to prep fruit for us. First we had volunteers to assist Allie, but soon she was working on her own. She also became more comfortable being in the store so we moved her to a Saturday morning shift where she learned how to open the store. We were so proud of Allie's determination to do her job and do it well.

A short while later, Allie was offered a job at Aubrey's restaurant where she is employed now and loves it. Of course we miss her - but we also know the goal is to go out into the community, taking the skills learned at Menchie's and applying them elsewhere.

Houston

Houston has been with us for two years now. He started out working a few hours during the day, and now opens the store, independently. He is one of our strongest Team Members in closing the store and end of day responsibilities. He has dreams of opening his own Menchie's store one day.

Anna

This beautiful young lady came to us very quiet and shy. She has learned to speak up and welcome our guests. We have worked very hard on her money skills and she is now independent at the register. She no longer needs a list to close the store. She always volunteers to work for her co-workers when the need arises. Anna is another terrific example of hard work and persistence.

Elise

We actually transferred Elise to a different location because she was ready. Our "training" store provides support that is essential in the beginning, but when we realized that Elise no longer needed that level of assistance, we asked her if she'd like to work in a larger, faster-paced situation. She rose to the occasion. She knows her job and does it well. We are so proud of her.

These are just a few stories from the last two years. We at Menchie's are committed to giving these young people a start and helping them discover other opportunities when they have mastered skills here. This would never have been possible without the dedication of our Shift Leaders, who have demonstrated dedication and compassion in providing our Team Members with the tools

they need for success.

Come see us anytime you're in the area. We promise you'll leave with a smile on your face.

Christi Rice lives in Knoxville. She is a parent of a Menchie's Team Member and a graduate of the 2009-2010 Partners in Policymaking program.



Jesse Atkins



Reid Beeler



Jesse Harness

A Member of the College Community

by Julia Henderson , Youth Leadership Forum Graduate and Former Staff Member

Best Buddies International is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

My name is Julia Henderson. I live in Memphis. I also have a learning disability. I'm writing you this story about my sorority Sigma Kappa at the University of Memphis. They adopted me to be in the sorority through Best Buddies last year. My friend Khadijah is also in Sigma Kappa sorority.

Having a learning disability is not easy, and finding a group of friends that makes you feel welcome is not easy to find. But since I have been in Sigma Kappa, they have made me feel so welcome.

They make me feel like I belong there, and they don't judge. They are always there for me.

Summer Sheppard was the first sister from the sorority I got to know. I got invited to a Best Buddies party and Summer was there, and she introduced me to more of her sorority sisters, which made me so happy. I was really nervous at first, but they made me feel welcome.

They added me on Facebook and started following me on Instagram. And after that, they started inviting me to



Shelby Ragan, Stephney Pleasant, Annika Coley and me at my Birthday party



Me and Summer Sheppard at the Best Buddy's Party



Me, Khadijah Eddington, and Sam Brouillette at the Christmas Party

do things with them, like help bake for the sorority bake sale and raise money at the sorority breakfast they had at school.

When my birthday came around on December 1, my sorority sister, Mckell Ferguson, put the word out about my birthday and that we'd be going to paint ceramics at Seize the Clay. Several sorority sisters wanted to come but they were busy. But two sorority sisters - Stephaney Pleasant and Annika Coley - did come. Also my best friend Shelby Ragan who I met through Best Buddies, came too.

After that, my sorority Sigma Kappa posted a birthday message for me on Instagram, which really surprised me. It made me really feel like I was part of the Sorority. I got invited to the sorority Christmas party too, which was really so much fun. They gave me and my friend Khadijah Sigma Kappa Sorority shirts. We also played games at the party, and I won the sorority Christmas sweater contest, which I was so happy about. They always talk to me and tag me in photos and posts, and we take lots of photos together.

This letter is my way of thanking Sigma Kappa and showing them how grateful I am for letting me be a part of their sorority.

Best Buddies on campus

I started Best Buddies at my high school when I was 15 years old and I saw how much of an impact it had on my high school. So when I was searching for a college I wanted to find

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Putting Faith and Jobseekers

by Courtney Taylor, Associate Director of Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Communications and Dissemination

A new manual outlines how faith communities can support members with disabilities in finding and maintaining employment. The manual was developed by the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and its partners in the Putting Faith to Work (PFTW) project, which include University Centers for Excellence who make up the National Collaborative on Faith and Disability.

PFTW is an innovative approach that addresses a critical need. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is double that of people without disabilities. According to 2014 statistics from the Department of Labor, only 19.1% of people with disabilities participate in the labor force, versus 68.3% of people without disabilities.

"There have been many public and private sector initiatives focused on improving employment rates for individuals with disabilities," said Erik Carter, PhD, professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University and principal investigator on the PFTW grant. "Yet, despite these efforts, overall employment rates have remained virtually

unchanged. The unpredictability or lack of funding, limited programs, complicated eligibility requirements, long waiting lists, and myriad other factors all highlight the need for pursuing new avenues and new partnerships if we are going to change the employment landscape."

There are more than 335,000 churches, synagogues, mosques, and other places of worship nationally, so it made perfect sense for Carter and his colleagues to apply for a Signature Employment Grant through the Kessler Foundation to partner with faith communities in an effort to improve employment outcomes.

"The Putting Faith to Work model is actually engaging what ends up being among the most extensive networks of employers in any community," said Carter. "The average congregation has 186 attenders who themselves are connected to a number of different employment sectors. The model recognizes most jobs are obtained through personal connections, including jobs traditional job developers are unlikely to know about. And the model also engages faith community members who already have a vested interest in an individual and affirms the call of

College ... *Continued from page 5*

a place that offered a Best Buddies club as well. However, the University of Memphis didn't have one at the time. Even though I had dreams of getting out of Memphis and going to UT Knoxville, I decided that maybe something was keeping me here. So, I stayed in Memphis and started a Best Buddies chapter at U of M.

I also had joined a sorority and SO many members were like, "how can we get involved?" Finally, I thought about doing an "adopt a buddy" program so that each individual chapter got matched with a buddy that they would invite to events, support, attend Best Buddies events with, etc. Since it's only two years old we let the sororities and fraternities make it their own and I will say it is AWESOME!

Watching Greek Life on campus get a buddy is so rewarding and really helps social inclusion. You'd be amazed how many fraternities ask if they can host a Best Buddies event at their house. Kappa Alpha Order at the U of M has hosted two

cookouts and a bonfire for Best Buddies, and Sigma Chi has hosted a Thanksgiving get together at their house.

*I also have to brag on U of M and say that we even have sports teams that have "adopted" buddies. This just started this year so it's very new. - **Carlie Carter, University of Memphis, Best Buddies Memphis Chapter President, TigerLIFE Social Inclusion Unit Member and Phi Mu Kappa Lambda Le Bonheur Chair.***



Meeting sorority sisters at the Best Buddy's party.

with Disabilities to Work

scriptural traditions that individuals use their gifts in service and that communities recognize the dignity of work.”

Carter and partners in Texas, Minnesota and Kentucky were awarded the Kessler Foundation grant in January 2014. Administered through the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center in Tennessee, the model was implemented over the course of two years. Teams at each of the four sites provided support, coaching and encouragement to 25 diverse congregations who collectively have connected more than 50 individuals with jobs.

The model is outlined in the new replication manual, *Putting Faith to Work: A Guide for Congregations and Communities*. The manual provides step-by-step instructions for gathering a team, holding person-centered conversations to assess strengths and skills, and reaching out through the members of the congregation and beyond to find an employer in the community who needs exactly those strengths and skills in their workplace.

“Faith communities have a wonderful opportunity to enhance the lives of people with disabilities, their families, and their communities by helping people find meaningful jobs, assume valued roles and share their talents with others,” said Bill Gaventa, chair of the National Collaborative on Faith and Disability and a member of the Texas PFTW team. “The manual is a product of two years of important work that will encourage a unique way to support people well in all aspects of life—spiritually, relationally and vocationally.”

PFTW in Action: A Congregation’s Story

Christ Presbyterian Church (CPC) is a large congregation located in a suburban neighborhood in Nashville, Tennessee. The church has an active special needs ministry that began informally when a member

volunteered to care for a baby with Down syndrome during a service so the mother could worship. Over time, more families with sons and daughters with disabilities came to the church and a more formal ministry was established.

Though the special needs ministry is supported and active within the church, staff and families were looking for a way to minister with members with disabilities and their families beyond Sunday. They also wanted to address concerns that some families had expressed about feeling isolated from the larger church community. The congregation decided to pilot the *Putting Faith to Work* project as a way to meet employment needs and to make the young adults within their ministry “better known” within the larger community.

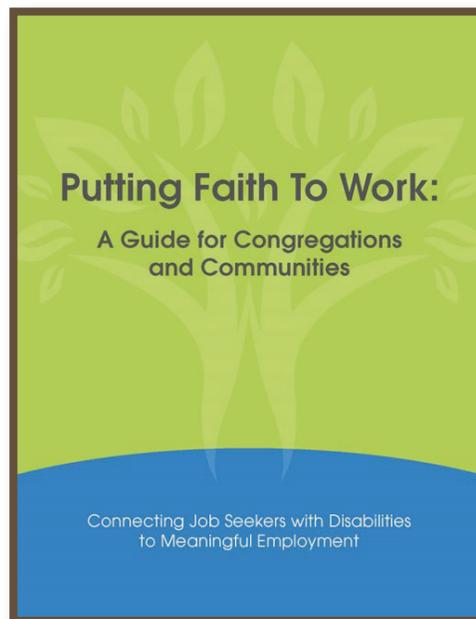
Gathering a team

The initial informational meeting consisted of the special needs ministry coordinator, who had extended personal invitations to staff, parents and church members with interest or experience in working with people with disabilities. Around 25 people attended. At the meeting, an overview of the project was presented and the group held a conversation about the potential need in the church, who might benefit and how the project might be structured. After the team affirmed participation in *PFTW*, a parent of a young adult son with a disability agreed to chair the team and the special needs coordinator agreed to provide administrative support.

Crafting a plan

The team decided to meet on a monthly basis. Early conversations focused on identifying members with disabilities who they believed should consider participation. Because the congregation has an established

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Putting Faith to Work: A Guide for Congregations and Communities outlines the model that congregations can use to connect job seekers with disabilities to employment.

Faith ... *Continued from page 7*

special needs ministry they decided to work, at least initially, with job seekers they already had relationships with and who attended church on a regular basis. Five candidates were identified.

They elected to begin working with two individuals and expand as initial successes were made. They also decided that team members could be involved in different ways. They polled the group to designate roles. Team members could invite job seekers, participate in the “Conversations about Work” to better understand their gifts and strengths, identify and make connections to employers, and/or provide on the job supports.

Team members also desired to integrate *PFTW* into the life of the church, making it an established Missional Community, which focuses on making a positive difference in the greater Nashville area. This made them eligible for small internal grants to support their efforts, gave them a Web presence, and further legitimized the project within the community.

A Conversation About Work

Once the candidates had agreed to participate, the team organized a time to convene the job seeker and his family, the team, and anyone else who could help to point out the gifts and talents of the job seeker. At the Conversation, the job seeker was able to select a menu and draft the invitation list. The team followed the questions provided through the *PFTW* program, which helped frame the discussion in an organized and productive fashion.

Connecting People with Employers

For CPC, this stage in the process presented the most challenges. Though many ideas emerged from the conversations, after potential employers with whom the team had personal relationships were exhausted, the team stalled. In response, they built a webpage on the CPC website, developed one-page job profiles for their job seekers, and were able to share them through their missional community blog and through other natural forms

of communication, like email and calls to friends and acquaintances in various employment industries. Another challenge was that the team only met monthly with periodic communication between meetings. Despite these obstacles, the team’s commitment kept them motivated and effective in making employment connections.

Supporting Job Seekers

Because *PFTW* is a formal Missional Community at CPC, the group was eligible for a small grant that could be used to meet project goals. The team decided that the grant could be used to provide for any work-related expenses like transportation to and from work, or required uniforms. Team members also made efforts to ensure that job seekers were prepared for interviews. They assisted with developing “job wanted” ads and one-page profiles that could be shared with potential employers.

Reflecting on the Journey

The team reflected at monthly meetings, especially when the process of connecting job seekers to employment felt stalled. They brainstormed new ways to disseminate information, new yet relevant job sectors to explore, and/or reassigned tasks. Reflections of each stage of the *PFTW* project from team members, job seekers and families at CPC are sprinkled throughout the manual.

For those interested in researching more information about PFTW, visit <http://faithanddisability.org/> and <http://faithanddisability.org/projects/putting-faith-to-work/>.



The Putting Faith to Work team at Christ Presbyterian Church poses after a “Conversation About Work” with one of its participants.

School-to-Life

by Dora Warman, Program Director, TARP, Inc.

T.A.R.P. Inc. Center for Independent Living, is an IRS 501 (c) 3 nonprofit, non-residential, charitable organization in Paris, Tennessee directed and staffed by individuals with disabilities, working to promote the dignity, independence and civil rights of Tennesseans with disabilities. The Center's goals are to offer cross-disability services, promote active citizenship and work with others to create services that support self-determination and full participation in community life. Founded in 2005, its core services include independent life skills training, information and referral services, individual and community advocacy, peer-to-peer support, and transitional services for people wanting to come home from nursing homes and youth leaving high school and entering the adult world.

TARP is the first truly rural-based Center for Independent Living in Tennessee, serving eight counties in Northwest and North-Middle Tennessee including, Benton, Dickson, Henry, Houston, Humphreys, Montgomery, Stewart and Weakley.

S2L

TARP staff has worked diligently to provide Youth Transition services to the schools. Through a program called School-to-Life (S2L), TARP is currently partnering with Henry County High School with a curriculum that teaches proper communication strategies, career exploration, résumé building, interviewing skills, post-secondary education processes, financial responsibility, community resources and conflict resolution. TARP staff visit a Henry County high school class weekly for an hour for 16 weeks to delve deeply into skill building for what students will experience in life after high school.

Throughout this process, TARP involves willing community members to attend and perform mock interviews with the students. This provides a two-way benefit – it helps to educate students on interviewing skills and educates local hiring managers about students with disabilities who are eager to be employed. The school program also allows TARP to build a strong relationship with the school and its students, which furthers the Center's outreach into



the area that it serves, spreading the independent living philosophy.

Eventually, TARP intends to provide Youth Transitions programming to junior high and elementary school students. The belief is that early education and awareness will increase the opportunities for students with disabilities to become engaged in, and fully participating members of, their communities.

Youth Leadership Academy

TARP is collaborating with the Council on Developmental Disabilities to bring a S2L Youth Leadership Academy to Paris, June 13-15. The week before, a similar training will take place at the Memphis Center for Independent Living, from June 6-9. The goal of these Academies is to get high school students with disabilities thinking about their lives after high school, and to inform them of services and resources in the community that can support them as they transition to adulthood and more independence.

TARP's three-day event will cover topics such as:

- The History of the Self-Advocacy and Independent Living Movements
- The Importance of Speaking up for Yourself
- State and Community Resources
- Developing a One-Page Plan
- Putting Technology to Work for You
- Communicating with Legislators/Telling Your Story, and much more.

The training is free, and will run from 9 am to 4 pm each day, with lunch and snacks provided.

It is our hope that this will be the first of many incredible initiatives that will help the youth of today become the community leaders of tomorrow.

Learn more about TARP at <http://tarp1.org/>

Project SEARCH at East Ten:

by **Vanessa Herrmann, Coordinator Instructor, Project SEARCH, East Tennessee Children's Hospital**

Photos by Vanessa Herrmann, David Brooks and Travis Clevenger

The Project SEARCH High School Transition Program and Adult Learning Programs are unique, business-led programs that take place entirely at a workplace. Total workplace immersion for an extended period of time ensures a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and relevant job skills training through strategically-designed internships for youth and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Project SEARCH is in its fourth year at East Tennessee Children's Hospital in Knoxville. Our fourth class of students started in early February. We are very proud to celebrate such a successful program!

Six young women attended our first class, and five were employed. Our second class had seven graduates with five obtaining jobs. In our third class six graduated and we had a 100% placement rate for employment. The Children's Hospital has employed six of the graduates from the first three cohorts. The others who landed jobs found employment in the community-at-large.

We serve all disabilities in our program. It is a 9-month training in which each "intern" gets to experience three different types of jobs in separate rotations. They also learn soft skills – like social and communication skills – while having a support system in place to help them obtain and maintain a satisfying job of their choosing.

The day-to-day schedule of the program is unique. We begin in the classroom at 8:00 am for about an hour, learning about topics like hygiene, communication, the

difference between credit and debit cards, nutrition, job and interviewing skills. We also invite community members and employers to our class to discuss the aspects of different jobs, or issues such as why drug testing is important to employers or why safety matters.

Next, the interns go to their selected departments and train on the job. The skills acquired at each rotation depend on the area the interns are working in. If an intern is placed on the one-day surgical floor they would learn how to do a room turn over, which includes removing all information, stripping the bed, removing all linens, removing all equipment such as blood pressure cuffs and monitors and emptying the trash. They would also learn how to stock personal protective equipment, make slushes, maintain family kitchens and waiting areas, clean charts during patient turnovers, transport patients with supervision when discharged and work stock into supply rooms. In engineering, an intern would learn how to calibrate air units, change bulbs in the patient rooms, check drains in the patient rooms, cut and replace ceiling tiles, and maintain campus grounds including helping with seasonal changes such as removing leaves with a blower, putting salt down for snow or watering blooming flowers. An intern stationed in the cafeteria may work the salad

Chris Sanders was in my 3rd class. Chris was hired in November 2016 by the hospital to do recycling pick up throughout the hospital.



Michael Kelly was from our first class in 2014. She has been employed in Central Supply since December 1, 2014.

Tennessee Children's Hospital

bar, prepare family lunches, rotate the cooler, do dishes, clean and straighten the seating area or prepare the desserts. None of these are easy job placements!

At the end of the day we all gather for a brief meeting to discuss how the day went, what we learned, and what we could improve upon in subsequent days.

On a personal note, not only am I the Coordinator for Project SEARCH at East Tennessee Children's Hospital, I

have experienced Project SEARCH from the perspective of a family member. My sister Holly has been in my care and lived in my home for almost 20 years. She participated in the first class of Project SEARCH at our sister/partnering provider University of Tennessee Hospital. Holly graduated from the program and was placed in employment at UT Hospital working on the Heart Unit. She has been working 25 hours a week for the past two years.

This program works, and changes lives.



Carly Snidow is in a float position and she works between the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th floor. Carly helps run supplies and errands between the floors, she assists nurses with room turnovers, and helps with maintaining common areas and with sorting paperwork.



Curtis Hawkins on the left; Kelvin Wright on the right. They were both hired by S P Plus Corporation to maintain the three garages at the hospital.



Amy Cunningham graduated in October 2016 from Project SEARCH. She was hired to work on the surgical floor as a surgical services support tech. She started in October before she graduated the program. She helps stock all surgical supplies and is working over 25 hours a week.



Grant Rolph is a graduate of 2015. Grant was employed in the Engineering Department on September 30, 2015 at Children's Hospital. Grant has a variety of duties including grounds keeping (sweeping around hospital, watering the plants, and emptying the trash) room checks (ensuring sinks doesn't leak, calibrating the thermostats in patients' rooms, checking equipment, and changing out batteries), and changing damaged ceiling tiles.

An Exciting New Year for the

by **Lauren Percy, Director of Public Policy, Council on Developmental Disabilities**

During a time when the entire country is experiencing rapidly changing policy priorities with the inauguration of a new President, we at the Council are committed to developing a top-notch public policy program that will track policy as it develops, share pertinent information about the impact on people with disabilities, and ultimately work to strengthen those policies. As the new Director of Public Policy, I am excited to share a summary of our approach to policy work and a few examples of the efforts currently underway.

How do we approach our policy work?

The Council's ultimate goal is to maintain a deep knowledge about the disability service system and ensure policies are working for all Tennesseans – including people with disabilities. On one hand, we need to understand the system and upcoming changes in policy, so that we can share pertinent information with the people who use the disability service system – Tennesseans with disabilities and their families. Equally as important, we need to have a good grasp on their priorities so I, as Public Policy Director, can educate our policymakers and influence policy as it is made. It is through that two-way feedback approach that we carry out all public policy activities: from tracking legislation to making recommendations about a new state program.

What are the public policy activities underway currently?

The Council's public policy activities focus on both legislative activities and broader policy initiatives such as employment, education and healthcare. The broader policy work is year-round, and involves close working relationships with state agencies, national experts, and coalitions of real people whose lives are impacted by these topics. We know what's most important about our efforts are the outcomes; the impact on real lives. That's why one of the focuses of our employment policy work is highlighting role models who are living examples of success in employment. Council member Clancey Hopper is one great example of a person with a disability who is

successfully employed at the Grand Ole Opry here in Nashville.

Clancey joined the Employment First Task Force in presenting an annual report with policy recommendations about employment to the Governor in 2016, and had the chance to host Governor Bill Haslam and Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Commissioner Debra Payne. A short video of the tour can be viewed at www.youtube.com/user/DIDDTN ("2016 Expect Employment Report Presentation").

One new policy initiative we are excited to share is "Supported Decision-Making", which is a nationwide movement to formalize a way for people with disabilities to seek assistance with making decisions about their life, but do not want or need to have a legal representative make decisions on their behalf. The Council is part of a work group comprised of disability and legal experts

Employment-focused policy collaborations

Employment for people with disabilities is one of the Council's top policy priorities. Our work in this area illustrates the collaborative approach we take to policy activities. We are part of a broad coalition that coordinates all employment-related activities, TennesseeWorks, but we also facilitate a smaller, monthly "Employment Roundtable" which brings together eight state agencies and two community organizations to discuss ways that state government agencies who oversee disability services can work better together. Additionally, the Council sits on a Governor-appointed Employment First Task Force, which oversees a strategic plan related to employment policy activities and authors an annual report with policy recommendations to the Governor. These various groups ensure that a broad cross-section of perspectives are coordinated in our work toward a common goal. These collaborations have received accolades from other states as models of how disability service systems should work together on policy priorities.

Council's Public Policy Program

in Tennessee who are committed to making this an option for Tennesseans who choose to use it. Our group successfully worked with Senator Becky Massey (R-Knoxville) and Representative Mike Carter (R-Ooltewah) to introduce legislation SB264 and HB941 that would recognize supported decision-making in Tennessee.

During legislative session, which starts in January and usually concludes in April, I will be spending time tracking bills that may impact people with disabilities and developing relationships with legislators and key staff. For example, I have held meetings with legislative leads at eight different State agencies. We have also recently established contacts for the first time with the Department of Transportation and the Department of Economic and Community Development. These meetings are in addition to the ongoing meetings we are already holding among State agencies we have worked with for many years on disability-related policy work. We are proud of these

Policy Partnerships with Disability Organizations

During legislative session, much of the Council's work is coordinated through the Disability Policy Alliance, a formal partnership among the Council, The Arc Tennessee, Disability Rights Tennessee and the Statewide Independent Living Council. We meet regularly and compare notes on legislative priorities in an effort to represent Tennessee's disability community with one unified front.

National Partnerships

The Council works hard to stay abreast of national best practices and federal policy developments. We are part of a national network of state Councils which connects us to peers in other states, plus the most up-to-date federal policy from Washington DC. Additionally, all Councils are part of a broader national network known as the "DD Network". Through the DD Network, we can stay plugged into national resources from the National Network of University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities and state Protection and Advocacy systems.

growing partnerships because we know these are key to making public policy work for people with disabilities in Tennessee.

Additionally, since the General Assembly convened this year, I've been able to introduce myself and talk about the Council's work with more than a dozen legislators, targeting members who sit on committees that typically handle disability-related bills, and two important legislative offices: the Fiscal Review Committee and the Budget Committee. It is our goal to position ourselves as a go-to state resource about disability for legislators and their staff, so we can impact policy as it's made.

What's next?

As this is the first year for me as Public Policy Director, our focus is laying a solid groundwork for future activities. That's why I'll be spending so much time this year fostering relationships and carefully setting up a framework for tracking legislation, assessing existing policies, and listening to the priorities of the people who matter most: Tennesseans with disabilities. Toward that end, please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments concerning our legislative priorities and public policy in general. The best way to reach me is via email at lauren.j.pearcy@tn.gov.



The Council and public policy partners in Washington, DC

Supporting Brothers and Sisters through Sibshops

by Emma Shouse, Director of Communications, Council on Developmental Disabilities

Sibling relationships are often the longest-lasting relationships in a person's life. For children whose brothers or sisters have disabilities, these relationships can be complicated and full of unique joys, challenges and uncertainties about the future. Sibshops are events for young brothers and sisters of children with disabilities – typically targeted to children ages 8-13 – designed to offer peer support to those siblings through games, fun activities and providing time to talk through their unique concerns. One core idea behind Sibshops is that by offering support early and often to “typically-developing” siblings, they are more likely to remain involved and supportive of their brother or sister with disabilities in the future.

As a sibling myself, I had the privilege of experiencing firsthand the benefits of Sibshops when I was much younger here in Middle Tennessee. I am the older sister to twin younger brothers, one of whom has autism. Sibshops gave me the opportunity to meet other kids who also had brothers and sisters with disabilities, and illustrated that I wasn't alone in dealing with the experiences, positive and negative, that can come with having a sibling with an intellectual or developmental disability.

Sibshops showed me that while I may not have had many friends at school or church who could really understand what growing up with a brother like mine was like, there were other kids out there who did understand and could empathize. These events allowed me to ask my peers and other trusted adults some of the tough questions I had about what the future might look like for my brothers and me, and hear that other kids were wondering the same things. Attending Sibshops as a child taught me early on the value of sibling peer support, so I got connected

during my college years to TABS (TN Adult Brothers and Sisters), which is an official chapter of the national Sibling Leadership Network. TABS was created and is currently coordinated by Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and volunteer sibling leaders across the state.

TABS aims to empower siblings to lead fulfilling lives as they advocate for their brothers and sisters with disabilities. The mission of TABS is to provide information, support and networking opportunities for adult siblings of individuals with disabilities in the state of Tennessee. Many siblings of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities eventually take on some type of support or a caregiving role for their brother or sister, especially as aging parents are no longer able to provide the same level of care. Some siblings find themselves providing support to multiple generations of their families: parents, siblings with disabilities and their own children.



Promoting Sibshops across Tennessee

In August 2016, the Council funded a two-day training with Don Meyer, who is the creator of the Sibshop model and director of the Sibling Support Project, to teach attendees how to launch Sibshops in their local communities. Don provides training about running Sibshops across the world; he is also the

creator of a number of online communities for siblings like SibNet, SibTeen and SibKids (Facebook groups and/or Yahoo listservs).

The Sibshop Facilitator Training, hosted by TABS and supported by Tennessee School for the Deaf, was held at the Tennessee School for the Blind. It included a panel of adult siblings sharing their experiences growing up with a brother or sister with a disability and how it impacted them. Several of these individuals spoke about the



importance of TABS and finding information, support and connections with other siblings. The second day of the training featured a “demonstration Sibshop” with a small group of young siblings, who played typical Sibshop games and discussed their experiences and feelings about having siblings with disabilities, to model for the trainees how to facilitate a similar event.

Thirty people attended and it was sold out weeks in advance, with a waiting list! Anyone who goes through the Sibshop Facilitator Training can run Sibshops; attendees included parents of children with disabilities, adult siblings and professionals in the disability field.

Representatives from the following organizations attended:

- Autism Resources of the MidSouth
- Autism Site Knoxville
- Autism Tennessee
- Discovery Center at Murfree Spring, Murfreesboro
- Down Syndrome Association of Middle TN
- TN Deaf Blind Project
- TN Disability Coalition / Family Voices of Tennessee
- TN School for the Blind
- TN School for the Deaf

Siblings leading Sibshops

Caitlyn Brown, the Director of Philanthropy at the Discovery Center (a children’s museum in Murfreesboro), has a brother with disabilities and is now running a Sibshop at the Center after attending the August training. “I first learned about Sibshops from a parent on the Discovery Center’s Special Needs Council,” said Caitlyn. “As a sibling, I was immediately intrigued by the idea and jealous that I was never able to attend one as a child.

“As an adult sibling, I can see the relief in a child’s eyes as he learns that he’s not the only one with a sibling that occasionally has a meltdown or requires special therapies,”

continued Caitlyn. “I experience the camaraderie that develops as siblings talk about what makes their siblings so special. Being able to offer siblings a place to come together and explore these shared experiences is something I’m glad the Discovery Center can do.”

Tina Prochaska, one of the sibling leaders involved in TABS and a long-time Sibshop Facilitator, helped lead the August training. “I love Sibshops!” said Tina. “From the very first Demonstration Sibshop I attended way back in 1992, I was hooked! We’ve been hosting them at the Tennessee School for the Deaf since then and I’ve seen scores of sibs come through the program. In fact, we had to start a Teen Sibshop program because the 14-year-olds - who were aging out - did not want to stop coming. Several of our current adult Sibshop leaders are sibs who began our program as 8-year-olds! To me, that really speaks to the power – and joy – of Sibshops.”

How can you support siblings across the lifespan?

Interested in launching Sibshops in your community?

Let the Council

know! We can connect you to one of the “first-generation” facilitators (i.e. those who have been through Don’s official two-day training) or explore options for hosting additional future Sibshop trainings if demand is high.

Planning a disability-related conference, training or event? Invite TABS to present or host an exhibit table, and help us spread the word about sibling-related resources and supports.

Finally, we hope you share information about TABS with brothers, sisters and families of people with disabilities that you know. We believe brothers and sisters of individuals with disabilities can greatly benefit from opportunities to connect and share stories with one another about the rewards and challenges that can come from having a sibling with a disability.

Connect with TABS via email (info.tabs@vanderbilt.edu) or Facebook (www.facebook.com/tabs.siblings/).

Contact me for more information at emma.shouse@tn.gov.



The Council's Scholarship Fund

Alicia Cone, PhD, Director of Grant Programs, Council on Developmental Disabilities

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities has for many years provided financial and staff resources to the operation of a grant program that allows Tennesseans with disabilities and their family members to attend training and learning opportunities both within Tennessee and across the country. The program has most recently been referred to as the Education Travel Fund and the Stipend Fund. With the implementation of our new five-year State Plan, which will run from October 1, 2016 through September 30, 2021, the Council decided to expand the scope and priorities of the program. Additionally, we will be rebranding the program as the "Scholarship Fund" to more accurately reflect this expansion.

At its heart, the Scholarship Fund still provides financial support that allows participation in training, learning and engagement activities for Tennesseans with disabilities and their families. Specifically, there are two categories of scholarships offered: individual and family member, and organizational.

The Individual and Family Scholarship program assists Tennesseans with disabilities and their families, especially individuals from diverse backgrounds, to attend:

- cross disability and culturally-diverse leadership coalition meetings
- disability conferences
- disability trainings

These educational, learning, training and engagement opportunities can be held in Tennessee and the 48 contiguous states.

The expansion in this category is that this fund may now be used to support attendance at meetings of groups that are cross disability and/or culturally diverse. This is how we hope to expand the participation of people with disabilities and family members in these types of groups.

The Organizational Scholarship program does the following:

- assists an organization to support a number of Tennesseans with a disability and/or family members to attend disability conferences
- assists an organization to fund conference speakers presenting on disability topics
- provides stipends to Tennessee disability conferences
- provides stipends to organizations to support a Council priority:
 - 1) leadership development,
 - 2) impacting policy and practice, and
 - 3) informing and educating stakeholders.

The fourth option, supporting a Council priority, is an expansion from the Education Travel Fund. It allows for organizations to apply for small amounts of funding to implement innovative initiatives that would demonstrate a promising or best practice, or policy.

Priority for these scholarships over the last five-year State Plan was given to first time applicants, first time attendees at a particular event, a conference not previously supported, and any self-advocacy conference. With this new State Plan cycle, an additional priority has been added: individuals from diverse backgrounds. Demographic data collected during FY16 revealed that this fund is reaching primarily white, female, family members from urban settings. The Council would like to expand that reach to reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of Tennessee as highlighted in US Census Bureau data. Therefore, one of the significant outreach pushes we will be making is to groups who can better assist us in spreading the word about this program to racially-, ethnically- and culturally-diverse communities.

Our hope is that these changes will result in Tennesseans who have increased knowledge about disability issues, policies and resources, and, ultimately, increased skills which allow them to engage in systems advocacy around the topics they learn more about.

If you need further information about the Scholarship Fund or wish to share recommendations related to this opportunity, please contact Alicia Cone at alicia.cone@tn.gov or 615-252-1105.

Barterville

by Dr. Laura Mellen Payne

Barterville is a place where people affected by disability, which is most of us, can count on each other without counting money. Our value and appreciation is in who we are and how we make a real, rich difference for each other, however we define it.

In this world that is constantly changing, who do you go to for help, support, comfort and strength and who comes to you?

With whom do you have relationships?

Are these people with whom you share resources of any kind, or could in the future?

Who are the people you can count on and they can count on you, on one hand, who would help each other or hear each other out at 2 am in the morning when you are sick, hurting, alone or needing some kind of immediate help?

These may be the people in your Barterville, the place where you can count on a few people to help each other. It may be family, friends, teachers or someone unknown to you a year ago. As we age and as we experience disability and other difficulties, it is important to identify who we can count on. Who do you trust with your life? Very likely, this will be different people at different times, especially if parents and grandparents have gone on.

Sometimes our family members will do things without thinking about money. Beyond our family, it's sometimes hard to get past money as an exchange. The idea for Barterville is based on Barter Theatre, which began when people brought items other than money to come see plays.



Laura and her sister, Susan



Dr. Laura Mellen Payne

But Barterville is about how life plays out on the real stage, especially for people affected by disability.

In real life, I've heard people say, "How much would you charge?" or "How much do I owe you?" Sometimes those questions are really hard to answer because things get stickier or more complicated when money's involved. I'm not thinking about materials or supplies or food or something that needs to be paid for, but things like time and attention and support, which really don't have a measurable cost but are immeasurable in value.

Sometimes we have to think about the value we give to other people, and decide what is valuable to share.

In Barterville, you generally don't have any money to pay someone to do something for you, but you may not have to. In Barterville, you have given something past, present or future to make the world a better place in a big way or a seemingly small way, like helping someone breathe easier, feel appreciated, not feel alone or have some hope. Then when your times come for needing comfort, help, strength or support, you know people will be there for you.

Who are the people that will step in and be your people? Who are the people that - before a parent or a sibling or another relative dies or gets ill or just can't be there for some reason - will be there for you? Who will help you live and die, be buried, and head onward? Who are the people in your heart of hearts that are with you, and you are with them, for the good and the bad times?

These people might be involved in helping you identify or access resources, but they are generally not case managers or therapists or some kind of service providers.

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Toward a Future of Flourishing: *Preparing Youth with Disabilities to Transition Successfully*

by **Blake Shearer, Erik Carter, Kelly Wendel, Rachael Jenkins, Lauren Bethune, Michelle Halman, and Shimul Gajjar**

The future is wide open for youth with disabilities in Tennessee.

All across our state, students with disabilities are entering the world of work, going to college, making their home in neighborhoods, forging new relationships and contributing to their communities. From Bristol to Memphis, from Clarksville to Chattanooga—our students are showing us all they can accomplish when provided the right combination of thoughtful planning, good instruction, strong supports, individualized opportunities and high expectations.

Helping these students transition well to adulthood is the primary purpose of special education. It is the reason we invest so much in providing students with disabilities an exceptional educational experience. Right at the outset of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, this overarching purpose is stated as follows:

“...to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living...” (italics added)

Our collective investment across their many years of schooling should help students with disabilities

Barterville ... *Continued from page 17*

These are people who look at you like you're crazy when you ask, "What do I owe you?", because there is no price tag on a person's life.

In Barterville, you matter because you matter, not because of what you have or don't have. You matter because you are a gift to all who know and love you.

Barterville is a world you create in this crazy and constantly changing world in which we live. It is a world you create with people you have identified as your people for your life.

transition to meaningful work, enable lifelong learning and contribute to a good life in their community. But far too many students with disabilities in Tennessee are still not experiencing the outcomes they hope for in early adulthood. Recent data from our state indicate:

- The high school graduation rate for students with disabilities is just 69%.
- The dropout rate for students with disabilities is 5%.
- Only 41% of young adults with disabilities are employed after leaving high school.
- Only 28% of young adults with disabilities go on to some type of postsecondary education.

For students served under some disability categories - like intellectual disability, autism, multiple disabilities and emotional disturbance - post-school outcomes can be even more challenging. Which leads to these questions:

How might we improve these numbers in Tennessee?

What can we do as educators to elevate outcomes for every student?

How do we place our students on a strong trajectory toward a future of great possibilities?

Transition Tennessee: A Blueprint for Student Success

Over the past year, we've been creating a unique online resource designed to equip educators all across our state

Dr. Laura Mellen Payne has lived in Tennessee most of her life and learned a great deal from living in a rehabilitation hospital for children in Memphis 40 years ago. She has tried to live her life with family and friends past, present and future, based on those days. She currently works with East Tennessee Technology Access Center as a rehabilitation technology provider, and is a member of the 2016-17 Partners in Policymaking class.

Laura would like to give a special thanks to Jason McClure, who inspired Barterville and inspires everyone he knows every day.

to provide exceptional transition services and supports for students with disabilities. Transition Tennessee (www.transitiontn.org) is a free professional development portal that brings together in one place the very best of what we know works for promoting successful transitions for students with disabilities. It describes the steps educators can take - in partnership with families, communities, and adult agencies - to help students identify, work toward and achieve their post-school goals. It brings together best and recommended practices in our field. And it offers a results-oriented framework to equip educators with the knowledge, resources and evidenced-based practices that promote collaboration and produce students ready for postsecondary success.

Presently, we have developed five courses focused on:

- Guiding Principles for Transition
- Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment
- High-Quality Transition Planning
- Pathways to Employment
- Supports and Partnerships

As we continue to develop this resource, we are working on additional courses addressing Pathways to Postsecondary Education, Pathways to Community Life and Pathways to Self-Determination.

Each of these courses contains a rich array of strategies, resources and ideas to support our state in this very important work. Short, engaging lessons focus on best practices related to each topic. Case studies illustrate how these practices might be implemented with students. Videos demonstrate how these practices are being applied across the state. And downloadable resources provide helpful tools for carrying out this work.

Accessing Transition Tennessee

Transition Tennessee can be accessed at <http://www.transitiontn.org>. Although the website is free, it does require registration. And while we place a Tennessee accent on all of the content, the website will also be a valuable resource for educators across the country. We also invite parents, advocates, service providers and others to access this resource. The more we all pursue best practices together, the better the outcomes will be for students with disabilities across our state.

Authors' Note:

Transition Tennessee is a partnership among the Tennessee Department of Education, Vanderbilt University's Department of Special Education and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. We invite your feedback and suggestions as we strive to improve the quality and relevance of this resource. Please send feedback to info@transitiontn.org.

Blake Shearer, EdS, is the High School Intervention and Transition Coordinator for the Department of Education. In this role, he works with school districts and postsecondary partners to prepare students with disabilities for life after high school. Prior to this role he was a paraprofessional, special education teacher, and consulting teacher in Putnam County.

Erik Carter, PhD, is a Professor in the Department Special Education at Vanderbilt University and a member of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. His research and teaching focuses on evidence-based strategies for supporting access to the general curriculum and promoting valued roles in school, work, and community settings for children and adults with intellectual disability, autism, and multiple disabilities.

Kelly Wendel, MEd, is an educational consultant with Vanderbilt University. She earned her Master's degree in special education from Peabody College at Vanderbilt and has worked as a consultant and program coordinator with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center since 2004, specializing in Autism Spectrum Disorders and postsecondary education and transition programming.

Rachael Jenkins, MA, is an Educational Consultant with Vanderbilt University. She graduated from George Washington University in 2012 with a degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and worked in the Washington, D.C. public vocational rehabilitation system prior to her work with Vanderbilt.

Lauren Bethune, PhD, oversees the program of study and all academics support initiatives at Next Steps at Vanderbilt. Lauren earned her Doctorate of Philosophy in special education from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 2015.

Michelle Halman, BS, is an Educational Consultant with Vanderbilt University. She assists in the creation of written resources and professional development trainings which focus on transition and employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Michelle also works with employers and providers throughout Tennessee to equip them with more effective tools and approaches to increase the employment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Shimul Gajjar, MEd, is an Educational Consultant with Vanderbilt University. She graduated with her Master's in Special Education from Vanderbilt in 2016.

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